

## Facts vs. Influence

# CIA Operations Pose Dilemma

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A basic contradiction between the two functions entrusted to the United States Central Intelligence Agency appears to be behind the recall of the CIA chief in Saigon to Washington.

Intelligence gathering is one function. Operations is another. The contradiction is likely to show up in countries other than South Vietnam.

In Asia, for example, CIA operations face real or potential difficulties in South Korea and Nationalist China because of this contradiction.

If the CIA's function were simply to gather intelligence, its agents would not need to become involved in the local politics of a given country to a damaging degree. There probably would always be a degree of involvement, for it is impossible for a man to be completely colorless.

When the CIA becomes involved in operations, however, it is difficult for agents to avoid taking sides on a given issue. It is no great secret that CIA agents in Laos supported the forces of rightist Gen. Phoumi Nosavan after the Kong Le coup in 1960 had installed Prince Souvanna Phouma as Premier with a neutralist policy.

### Extraordinary Scene Witnessed

This reporter was present at one extraordinary scene in Vientiane's leading hotel—the entire rightist Cabinet neatly dressed in coats and ties conspicuously sitting down to lunch with their CIA adviser, the only man at the table in a white open-necked shirt.

In the case of South Vietnam, President Kennedy made a basic decision to supply massive economic and military aid to the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu in November, 1961, following the report of Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, who was then Mr. Kennedy's personal military adviser. The purpose of the aid was of course to help South Vietnam fight increasingly serious Communist insurgency.

Although even in those days the State Department tried to emphasize that the aid was going to "the people of South Vietnam," in practice it was impossible for such aid to be effective unless it was channeled to and through the Diem government. "Working with Diem" was thus a practical necessity for all American agencies in Saigon, including the CIA.

### Views on Priorities Differed

It was obvious from the start of this collaboration that Washington and Saigon had different views about the priorities to be assigned to certain tasks.

For instance, the United States was convinced that the Communists were winning over the aboriginal mountain tribes who inhabit the strategic high plateau area, not merely because of positive Communist propaganda but because of gross neglect and prejudice on the part of Vietnamese officials, who regarded the tribesmen as savages.

The Americans got Saigon to agree that a crash program to win back the tribesmen was essential. But South Vietnamese resources were limited, Saigon's bureaucrats were slow moving, and their prejudices were difficult to eradicate overnight.

Thus Operation Montagnard, the program aimed at winning back the tribesmen, in its initial stages became a CIA responsibility because the CIA was equipped to get the ball rolling.

While the Americans were able to bypass some lower-level Vietnamese officials, this was only because at the highest level they had the support of the President's brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can. Mr. Nhu is political counselor to the President and Mr. Can heads the

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### Top-Level Relations Maintained

This is only one well-known example of a CIA operation which was decidedly beneficial to the war effort and beneficial for the tribesmen as well. Such an operation would not have been possible unless the CIA had maintained excellent relations at the top level with the host government. In the case of South Vietnam, this meant the President and his family.

At the same time the United States has been wrestling with a problem fundamental to the success of the anti-Communist war effort. How viable, how popular, is the Diem regime? Is it capable of winning the war? Would another government be more capable of leading the war effort?

If the Diem regime is going to lose the war, would not United States efforts be better directed to a conscious attempt to get a better government?

These are questions that Washington obviously has been asking itself for a long time. The answers can only be found in South Vietnam—by sampling rural and urban opinion, by talking with a wide variety of Vietnamese both inside and outside the government.

### Frankness Hindered by CIA Policy

Some of this information can be gathered through normal diplomatic channels. But much of it must be actively sought out by an undercover agency such as the CIA, particularly in countries such as South Vietnam, where the government consciously tries to suppress all unfavorable information. If, for instance, a Kong Le type of plot were brewing in the Army, the United States should not be caught off guard when it happened.

But no South Vietnamese oppositionist is likely to talk frankly to an agency which he knows is intimately bound up with the very government he may be trying to overthrow. Here is the dilemma for the CIA.

Many Vietnamese this reporter has talked to feel that the CIA has made things even more difficult for itself by reporting directly to Mr. Nhu the contents of conversations which opponents of the regime may have had with its agents. Some Vietnamese directly accuse John Richardson, the recalled CIA chief, of this practice. I have been told by informed non-Vietnamese sources that this was indeed so and that the practice was not stopped until direct orders from Washington arrived two months ago.

### Formosa and Korea Difficulty Looms

Problems similar to the South Vietnamese case could arise in Nationalist China, where the CIA advises the Nationalist government on certain aspects of its war against the Communists. But here it could be placed in the position of having to listen to opposition plans whether within the Nationalist establishment or among the Formosa population.

Again in South Korea the CIA is said to have advised the military junta when it set up its own CIA. But the South Korean CIA has become one of the most controversial arms of the military regime, being regarded as a kind of secret police. To the extent that American intelligence agents work in South Korea, some of the unpopular feelings directed against that agency also fall on the Americans.